



# ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

## The Science of Fun



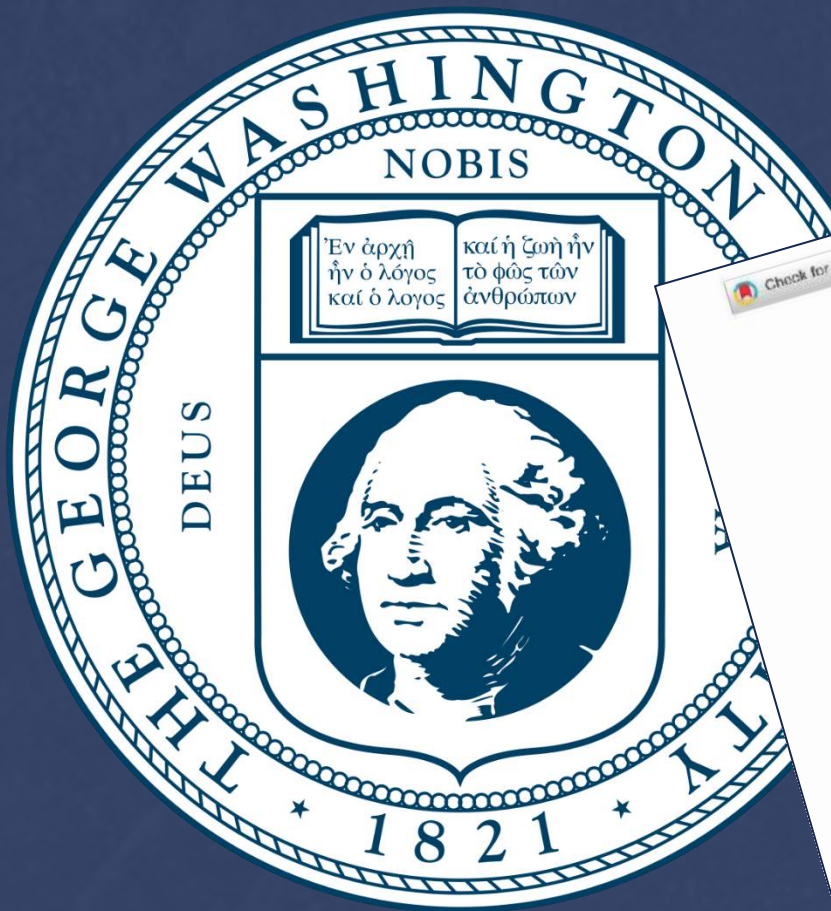
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ADM Manager, Female Hockey





# FUN INTEGRATION THEORY



International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching  
Journal of Sports Sciences  
Women in Sport and Physical Activity

Original research

## Perceived importance of the integration theory's factors and determinants: A comparison of youth soccer players, parents, coaches, players, parents, and coaches

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**Abstract**  
Conceptualized by youth soccer players, parents, and coaches, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the parents (responsible for the fun-determinants), youth soccer players (responsible for the fun-determinants), coaches (responsible for the fun-determinants), and go-zone displays and go-zone displays that are unique to concept-mapping method. The study identified exact points of agreement and disagreement between youth soccer players, parents, and coaches. The study also identified extraordinarily high ( $r = 0.89-0.93$ ) and low ( $r = 0.01-0.05$ ) correlations between youth soccer players and coaches. The study also indicated consensus was significant ( $r = 0.77-0.97$ ) between youth soccer players and coaches. The study also indicated that fun-determinants between groups are consistent with developing fun schemas. The study is a player and coach-centric when creating fun, positive, and enjoyable experiences.

**Keywords**  
Association football, enjoyment, fun, youth development

**Introduction**  
Youth sport programs are centered on physical activity and day-to-day operation of these programs. Youth sport programs are rarely centered on fun. Indeed, there is a growing emphasis on performance-oriented, scientific studies that seek evidence-informed approaches to youth sport experiences. Further scientific understanding of the fun-determinants is a key to their sustained participation in their adolescent years. It is important to understand for intentional programming not exist until we understand

Human Kinetics  
ARTICLE

## Young Athletes' Fun Priorities: Age, and Levels of Play

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or less important to youth athletes based on binary (competitive vs. recreational) play (recreational vs. travel). The fun-determinants study offers a robust framework from which to explore: (a) the extent to which youth athletes' fun-determinants evolved as a function of their age and level of play, and go-zone displays were produced to identify the fun-factors ( $r = .90-.97$ ) and fun-determinants of youth soccer players. Overall, results were consistent with developing fun schemas. The study is a player and coach-centric when creating fun, positive, and enjoyable experiences.

competition, thus requiring families invest greater resources in their children's sport development (Dorsch, King, & Rothlisberger, 2016; Green & Tumman, 2007).

**Background**  
The pathways between more recreational play likely contribute to the perception of fun. The fun-determinants are a direct correspondence within today's culture is what is fun for youth athletes (e.g., winning games) is categorized as fun for youth athletes (e.g., being with their friends). Youth athletes have noted it is routine for youth sport experiences to be fun. Further scientific understanding (i.e., performance, participation) often at the expense of the fun-determinants (Côté & Viera, 2014). It is important to understand what is most fun for youth players in their adolescent years. It is important to understand for intentional programming not exist until we understand

1





# INTEGRATING THE SCIENCE OF FUN



**ADM**



**AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT MODEL**



# WHAT IS FUN?



- **It's the #1 reason why kids play sports**
- **You know when you're having it**
- **You know when you're not**



# OUR FEAR AS ADULTS





# COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS



## MYTH:

Fun is synonymous with “goofing off”

## MYTH:

Fun is mutually exclusive from athlete development.



FUN

ELITE  
PERFORMANCE



**HOW EXACTLY DO YOU DEFINE FUN?**



**Ask the kids what they  
want**





**One thing that makes  
playing sports fun for  
players is...**





**Winning**

**Talking and goofing  
off with teammates**





# Scrimmaging during practice

Showing team spirit with gear, ribbons, signs, etc.

Partner and small group drills

Supporting my teammates

Getting/staying in shape

Being known by others for your sport skills

Going to sports camp

Playing your favorite position

Getting pictures taken

End-of-season/team parties

Having people cheer at the game

Having nice sports gear and equipment

Getting playing time

Copying moves and tricks that professional athletes do

Playing well during a game

Going out to eat as a team

Learning new skills

Getting clear, consistent communication from coaches

Having well-organized practices

Earning medals or trophies

Setting and achieving goals

Exercising and being active

Getting help from teammates

Being around your friends

Playing on a nice field

Winning

Being challenged to improve and get better at your sport

A coach who allows mistakes while staying positive

Getting complimented by other parents

Meeting new people

Staying in hotels for games/tournaments

Trying your best

Doing team rituals

# fun

Doing a cool team cheer

When a coach encourages the team

Getting along with your teammates

Talking and goofing off with teammates

When a coach jokes around

When a coach treats players with respect

It relieves stress

Taking water breaks during practice

Traveling to new places to play

# Competing

Ref who makes consistent calls

Practicing with specialty trainers/coaches

Ignoring the score

A nice, friendly coach

Hanging out with teammates outside of practice or games

Being congratulated for playing well

Being supported by my teammates

Learning from mistakes

High-fiving, fist-bumping, hugging

Partner and small group drills

Eating snacks/treats after the game

Ball touches, including dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.

Being strong and confident

It relieves stress

Playing against an evenly matched team

A coach who knows a lot about the sport

Improving athletic skills to play at the next level

Playing hard

When parents show good sportsmanship by being encouraging

# Working hard

Making a good play by scoring, making a big save, etc.



# WHAT MAKES PLAYING SPORTS FUN?



*Youth sport athletes identified these 81 fun-determinants that they organized into 11 fun factors and rated each determinants' relative importance to having fun.*

(Visek et al., 2015)

## #1 – Trying Hard

- Trying your best
- Working hard
- Exercising and being active
- Getting/staying in shape
- Playing well during a game
- Being strong and confident
- Competing
- Making a good play by scoring, making a big save, etc.
- Setting and achieving goals
- Playing rough

## #2 – Positive Team Dynamics

- Playing well together as a team
- Supporting my teammates
- When players show good sportsmanship
- Being supported by my teammates
- Getting help from teammates
- Warming up and stretching as a team

## #3 – Positive Coaching

- When a coach treats players with respect
- A coach who knows a lot about the sport
- Having a coach who is a positive role model
- When a coach encourages the team
- Getting clear, consistent communication from coaches
- A coach who listens and considers players' opinions
- A coach who allows mistakes, while staying positive
- A coach who you can talk to easily
- A nice, friendly coach
- Getting compliments from coaches
- When a coach participates with players during practice
- When a coach jokes around

## #4 – Learning and Improving

- Being challenged to improve and get better at your sport
- Learning from mistakes
- Improving athletic skills to play at the next level
- Ball touches, including dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.
- Learning new skills
- Using a skill you learned in practice during a game
- Playing different positions
- Going to sports camp
- Copying moves and tricks that professional athletes do

## #5 – Games

- Getting playing time
- Playing your favorite position
- Playing against an evenly matched team
- Being known by others for your sport skill
- Playing on a nice field
- Playing in tournaments

## #6 – Practice

- Having well-organized practices
- Taking winter breaks during practice
- Having the freedom to play creatively
- Doing lots of different drills and activities during practice
- Scrimmage during practice
- Partner and small group drills
- Practicing with specialty trainers/coaches



# WHAT MAKES PLAYING SPORTS FUN?



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(Visek et al., 2015)

## #7 – Team Friendships

- Getting along with your teammates
- Being around your friends
- Having a group of friends outside of school
- Hanging out with teammates outside of practice or games
- Being part of the same team year after year
- Meeting new people
- Taking and goofing off with teammates

## #9 – Game Time Support

- A ref who makes consistent calls
- When parents show good sportsmanship by being encouraging
- Being congratulated for playing well
- Having people cheer at the game
- Having your parent(s) watch your games
- Getting complimented by other parents

## #11 – Swag

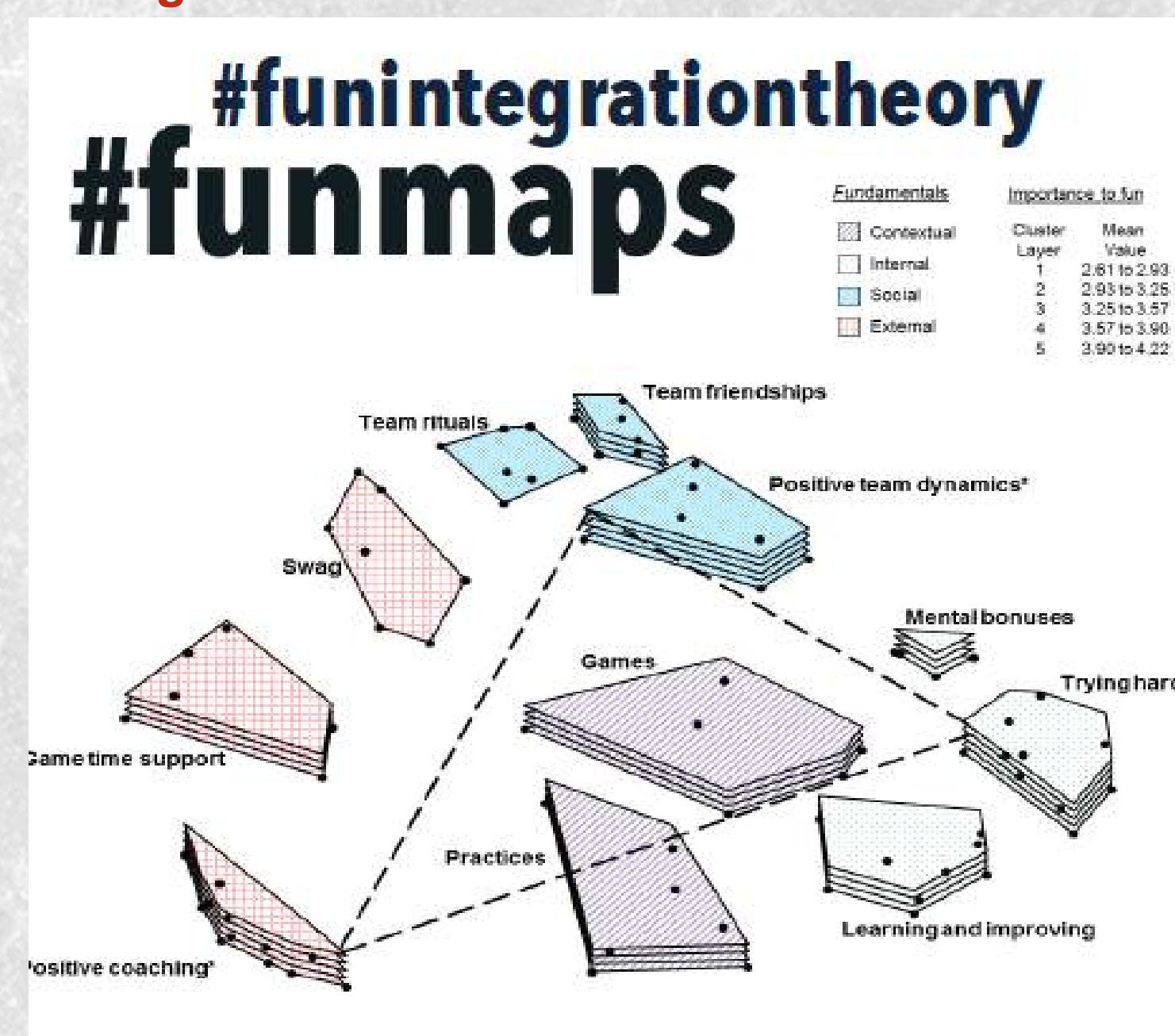
- Having nice sports gear and equipment
- Earning medals or trophies
- Traveling to new places to play
- Wearing a special, cool uniform
- Eating snacks/treats after the game
- Staying in hotels for games/tournaments
- Getting pictures taken

## #8 – Mental Bonuses

- Keeping a positive attitude
- Winning
- It relieves stress
- Ignoring the score

## #10 – Team Rituals

- Showing team spirit with gear, ribbons, signs, etc.
- High-fiving, fist-bumping, hugging
- End-of-season/team parties
- Going out to eat as a team
- Doing team rituals
- Carpooling with teammates to practices and games
- Doing a cool team cheer





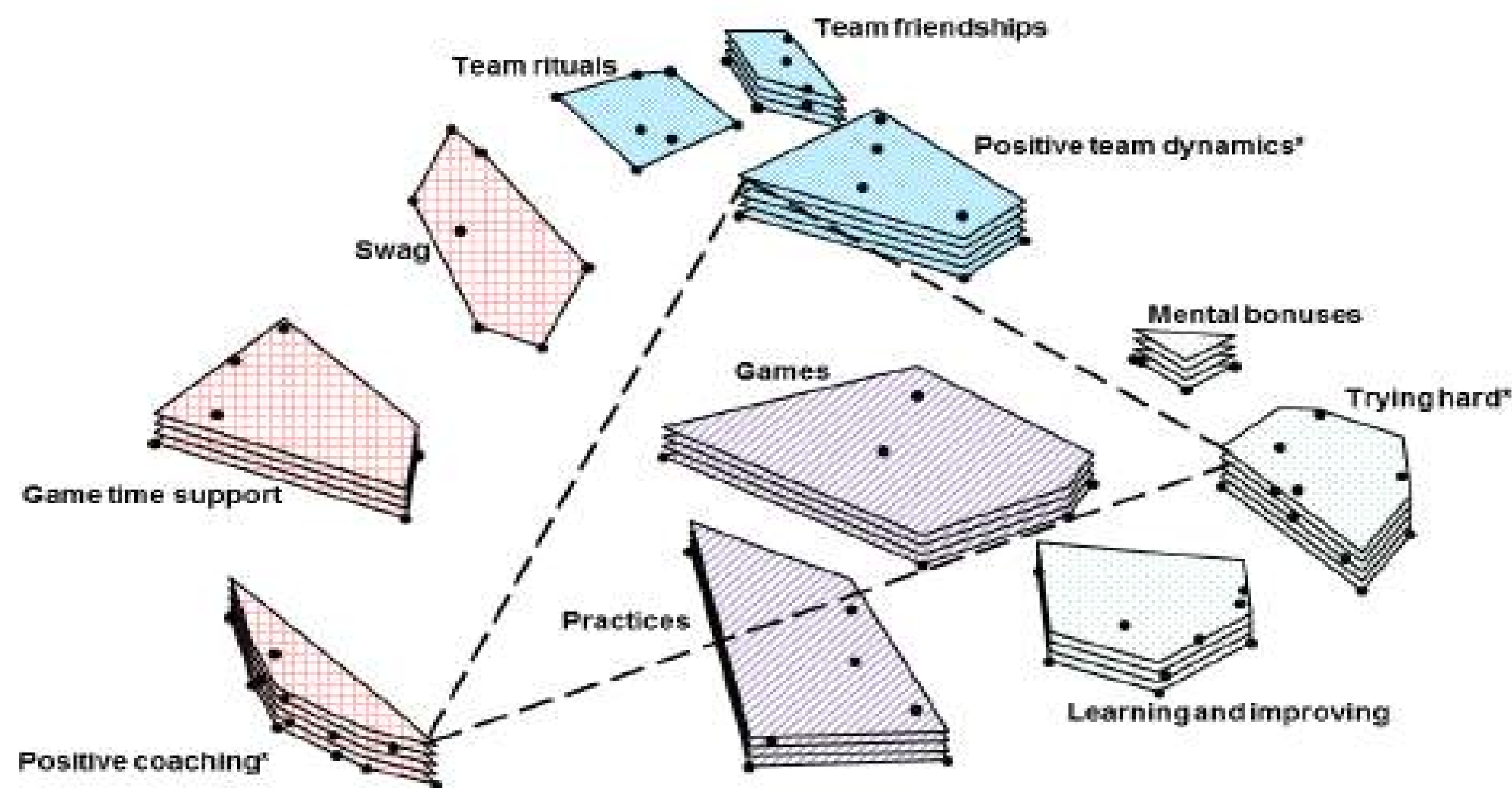
# WHAT MAKES PLAYING SPORTS FUN?



(Visek et al., 2015)

## #funintegrationtheory #funmaps

Fundamentals		Importance to fun	
		Cluster Layer	Mean Value
Contextual		1	2.81 to 2.93
Internal		2	2.93 to 3.25
Social		3	3.25 to 3.57
External		4	3.57 to 3.80
		5	3.90 to 4.22





# SOURCES OF FUN



(Visek et al., 2015)





# TOP 20 FUN-DETERMINANTS



(Visek et al., 2015)

1. Trying your best
2. Working hard
3. Exercising and being active
4. Playing well together as a team
5. Getting/staying in shape
6. Playing well during a game
7. Getting along with your teammates
8. When a coach treats a player with respect
9. Getting playing time
10. Being strong and confident
11. A coach who knows A lot about the sport
12. Keeping a positive attitude
13. Competing
14. A coach who is a positive role model
15. Being challenged to improve at your sport
16. Supporting my teammates
17. When players show good sportsmanship
18. A coach who encourages the team
19. Being supported by my teammates
20. Learning from mistakes



# SIMILARITY BETWEEN PLAYERS



## Fun-Factors Ranked by Importance

(Visek et al., 2015)

### Primary Importance

1. Trying hard
2. Positive team dynamics
3. Positive coaching

### Secondary Importance

4. Learning and improving
5. Games
6. Practices
7. Team friendships
8. Mental bonuses
9. Game time support

### Tertiary Importance

10. Team rituals
11. Swag

### *Key point!*

Young athletes are *more similar* than different when it comes to their fun priorities.

### *Warning!*

Coaches ranked importance of the fun-factors not congruent with players' reported importance.





## Trying Hard

- Trying your best
- Working hard
- Exercising and being active
- Getting & staying in shape
- Playing well during a game
- Being strong and confident
- Competing
- Making a good play (scoring/saving)
- Setting and achieving goals
- Play hard

## Learning and Improving

- Being challenged to improve & get better
- Learning from mistakes
- Improving skills to play at the next level
- Ball/puck touches, dribbling, passing, shooting
- Learning new skills
- Using a skill you learned in practice during a game
- Playing different positions
- Going to sports camp
- Coping moves/tricks of pro athletes





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## Learning and Improving

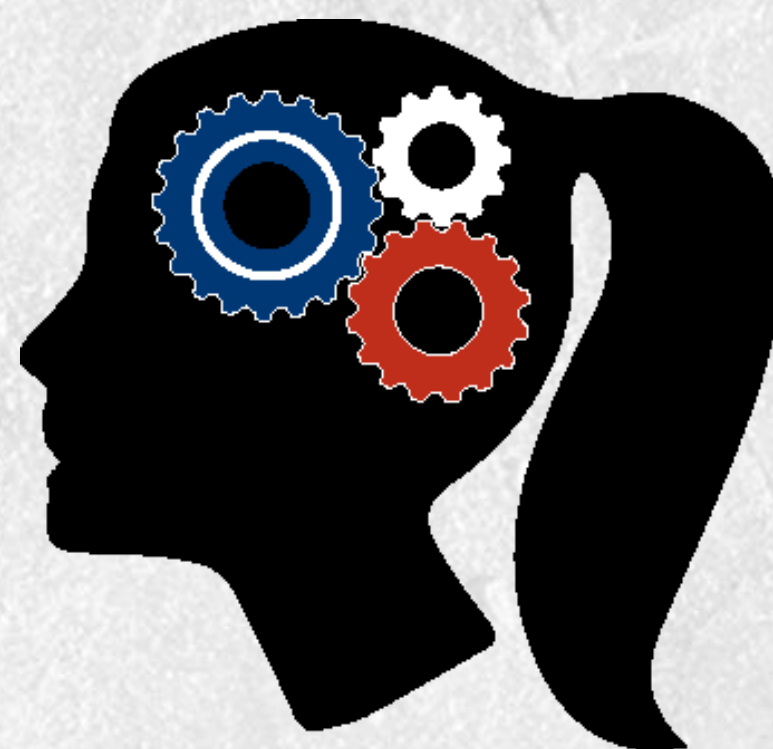
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# 5 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF GOOD PRACTICE DESIGN



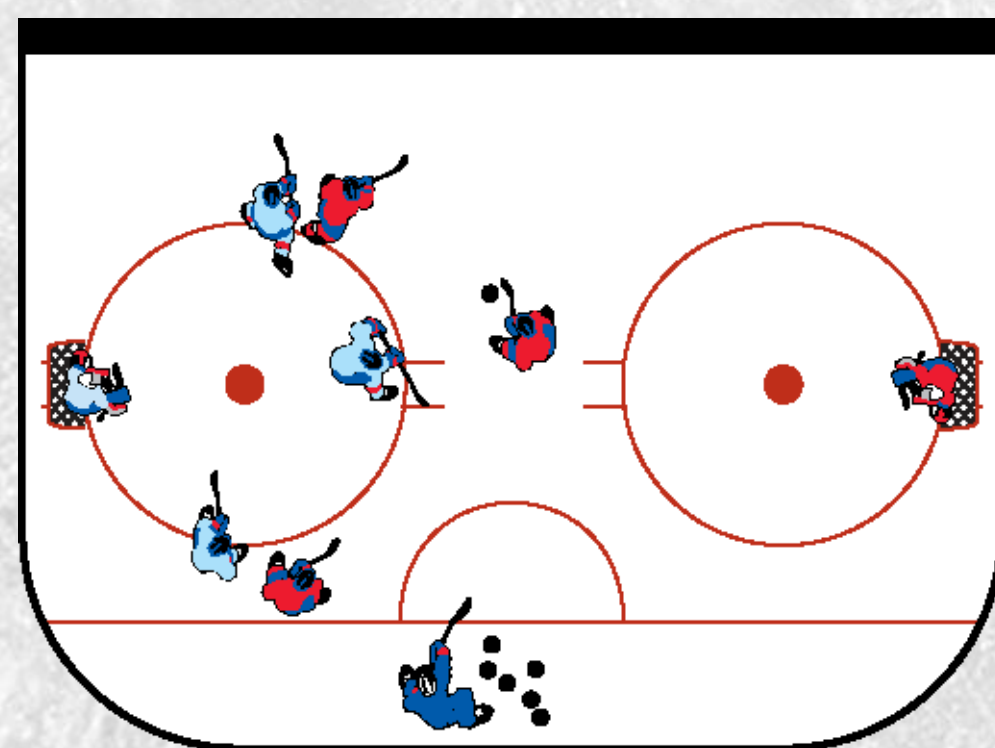
**Fun**



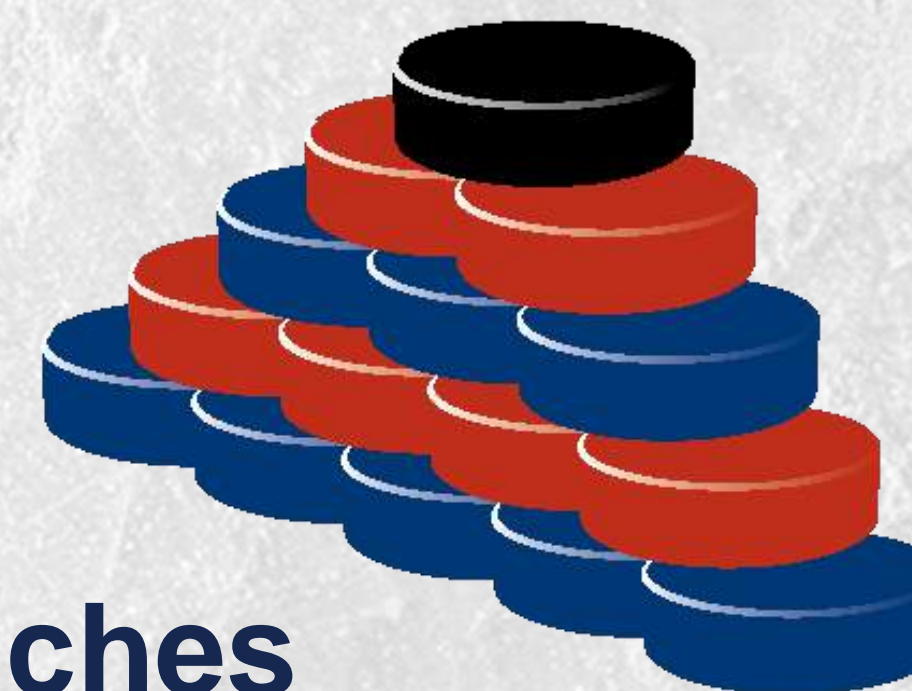
**Constant decision making**



**Challenges the players**



**Looks like the game**



**Puck Touches  
(Repetition without Repetitiveness)**



# PRACTICES FOR MAINTENANCE



**Those are your 5 on 0 drills, those are flow drills.... they're drills that basically get the blood flowing and the players are able to feel the puck and they're not too hard, but *they're doing nothing for the players development.***

*John Hynes*

- 82 game season, travel, players that have played for years and years
- Needed at the pro level to give them energy to play the next game



# PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPMENT



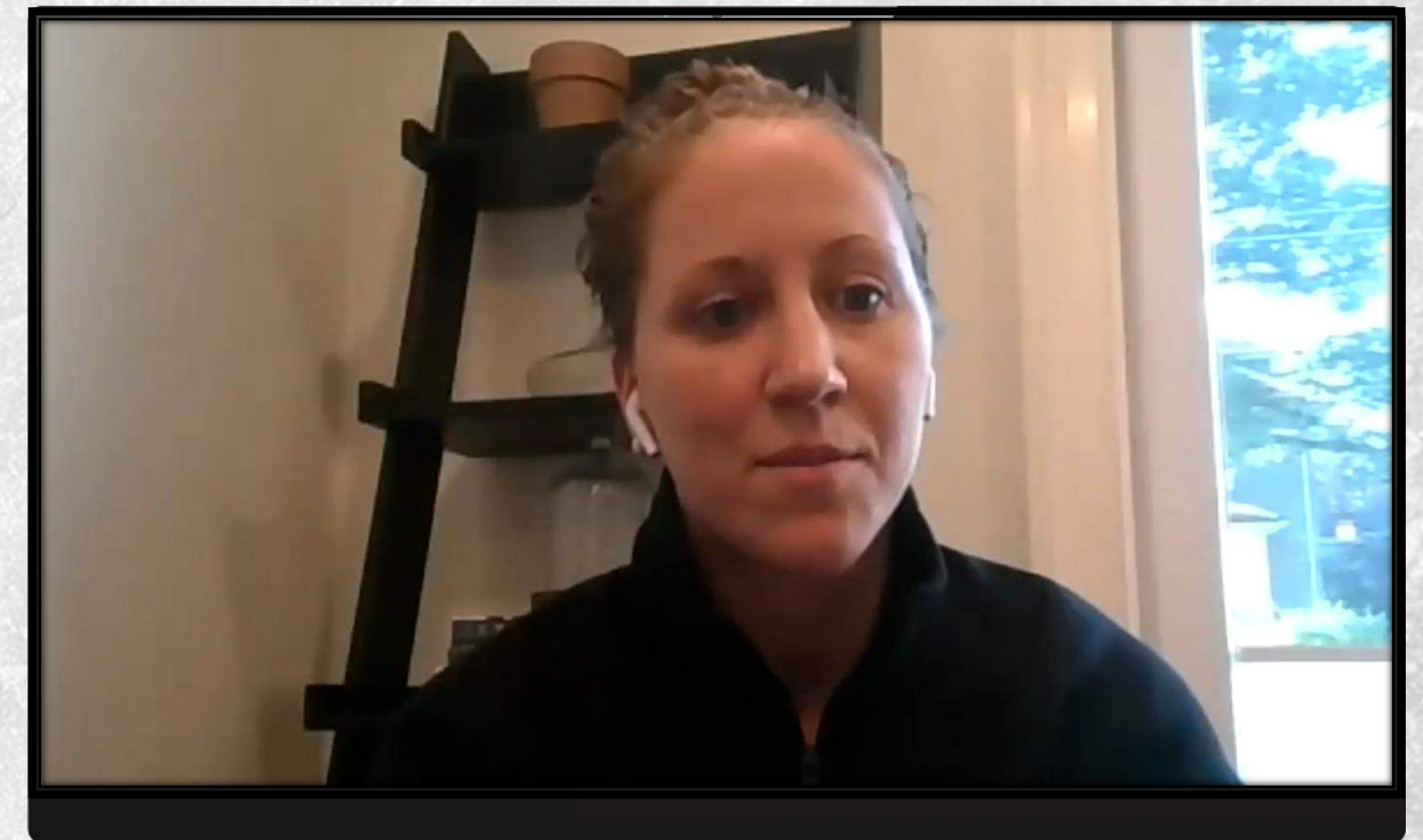
**You're putting a heavy emphasis on the pace in which you practice, you're putting them in situations where they have to think the game, there's multiple pucks in certain drills, *they're game-like situations*, those are areas where when you're practicing with your players.... *you're improving.***

**You are constantly have to engage them mentally and then put them in situations *that they have to think*, they have to *compete* and you're *putting them game-like situations*. That's a practice for *development*.**

*John Hynes*



# WHAT DOES FUN LOOK LIKE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS?





# WHAT DOES FUN LOOK LIKE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS?







**Fun *is* DEVELOPMENT**

**Development *is* FUN**





# HOW CAN YOU JOIN THE CONVERSATION



#funintegrationtheory #funmaps

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